

Draft Report
of the 29th Meeting of the
Council of Permanent Representatives of ECI (ECI-CPR)
(ECI Headquarters, October 1, 2018)

The Council of Permanent Representatives of ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) convened its 29th meeting at the ECO Headquarters on October 1, 2018 under the Chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Nematullo Emomzoda, distinguished Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan. The Meeting was attended by H.E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri, ECI President, and the distinguished Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as well as the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the ECO Cultural Institute. (List of Participants is enclosed as **Annex. I**).

Agenda item 1

Adoption of the Agenda

The meeting unanimously adopted the agenda of the meeting which had been circulated among the Member States vide Note No. ECI/524/858 dated, 26 September 2018 as follows:

1. Adoption of the Agenda,
2. Adoption of the Draft Report of the previous ECI-CPR meeting,
3. Statement by ECI President,
4. Approval of ECI Budget for the year 2019
5. Current Status of Outstanding Arrears of the Member States and Non-Payment of Annual Contribution for the year 2018
6. Finalizing the date of the 7th meeting of the ECI Board of Trustees (BoT).

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the Draft Report of the Previous ECI-CPR meeting

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan: referred to the extraordinary meeting of ECI-CPR and queried the latest status of implementation of decisions made at the said meeting.

President of ECI: elaborated that ECI has shared the issue of taking out a loan, verbally and written, with both former/incumbent ECO Secretary Generals which remained unrealized owing to administrative and financial hitches at ECO Secretariat. Also, the payment of annual contributions was followed up with the esteemed Member States which brought no outcome and the Member States should be accountable for that.

Chairman: emphasized that a workable solution for ECI's financial difficulty should be sought in the near future.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: referred to the recommendations of the extraordinary meeting of ECI-CPR and explained that the Government of Pakistan has already twice remitted its annual contribution to ECI but it has been returned due to the existing bank transfer problems. Therefore, Government of Pakistan has decided to remit its annual contribution to both ECO Secretariat and ECI through the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. At present, the announcement of account details by the Iranian embassy is awaited. The contribution of Pakistan including its arrears will be paid through the Iranian Embassy.

Agenda item 3

Statement by ECI President

H.E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri, ECI President made the following statement:

*Honorable Ambassadors and Representatives of the Member States,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great pleasure to convene the 29th ECI-CPR meeting in the company of the distinguished delegations of the Member States.

During recent months, the ECO Cultural Institute has organized a wide range programs, but before elaborating on the report of ECI's recent activities, I would like to make some points on ECI's annual budget, annual contributions and outstanding arrears.

Despite no contribution for the year 2018 received from any Member States, ECI managed to successfully hold a great variety of events which were financed through extra budgetary financial contributions and Memorandums of Cooperation.

The ECI's proposed annual budget for the year 2019 was prepared 4 months before the beginning of the upcoming year which has been unprecedented in the history of ECI and has been circulated among the esteemed Member States. Hopefully the proposed budget will be approved by the Member States in due course to avoid the financial constraints being faced in 2018.

Regarding the decisions made by the extraordinary meeting of ECI_CPR, held on 30 May 2018, ECI communicated to the ECI Member States for payment of their due annual contributions for the year 2017 and 2018 in cash by Embassies accredited to the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as payment of annual contributions to the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but no contribution has been received to date.

It is worth mentioning that in conformity with the practice which was previously followed at the ECO Secretariat, the Scale of Assessment for contributions of the Member States to the budget of ECI had been as follows: 75% of the total budget to be paid by the founding Member States (Iran

and Pakistan) and 25% of the total budget to be paid by the non-founding Member States (Afghanistan and Tajikistan). The same practice was implemented at ECI for a long time. The practice was also on the agenda of the 2nd meeting of ECI's Board of Trustees held in 2000. Anyway, the due annual contribution of the Member States has remained unchanged. With regards to the scope of ECO Cultural Institute activities, increasing inflation rate and the great goals and objectives planned for the Institute, it is proposed that the aforementioned practice may be re-adopted and the esteemed member states may kindly reconsider their contributions to the annual budget of ECI.

ECI is facing financial crisis incurred by lack of liquidity and has been unable to afford its staff (president included) salaries since many months ago. During 2017, we received only annual contribution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tajikistan. In other word, we received 200 thousand dollars as annual contributions for the year 2017. In fact, only 40 percent of the annual contributions for the year 2017 was received from the member states while the Institute conducted more than 80 percent of its approved work program for the said year. While only 3 months left till the end of 2018, no contribution from any Member States has been received for the year. Also, the outstanding arrears of the Member States, Tajikistan in particular, is still unsettled. The financial difficulty may force ECI to downsize its staff strength.

Regarding ECI recent activities, in order to expand the international outreach of ECO Cultural Institute, various meetings have been held with different international organizations and countries which has led to their participation in ECI programs. Also we have developed good partnership with the United Nations Information Center in Tehran and jointly commemorated the International Day of Peace.

A cultural event titled "Children's Voice and Peace" was also organized in cooperation with the Messengers of Peace and Friendship Group; during the event, the recorded track of "Peace" musical composition, conducted by the famous Iranian composer Loris Tjeknavorian was unveiled.

To promote cultural activities, a Memorandum of Understanding with the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been inked.

In addition, a trilateral agreement has been signed between the ECO Cultural Institute, Farabi Cinema Foundation and the Directorate-General of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Khorasan Razavi Province to exchange experiences and expand cinematic collaborations.

In line with the proclamation of the year 2018 as "Year of Reading Culture" in the ECO region, a Memorandum of Understanding has also been concluded with Association of Female Publishers of Iran. Also, in cooperation with the Digital Media and Information Technology Center of the Iranian Ministry of Culture as well as the ECO countries, we are working to launch the ECO Digital Publishers Association and we hope that the distinguished Member States will take the necessary steps in this regard.

In the last holy month of Ramadan, significant events were realized. During a ceremony, in the presence of a number of members of parliament and ambassadors, “ECI parliamentary fraction for cultural discourse” was established in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (The Parliament) of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is proposed that esteemed Member States endeavor for forming similar factions in their parliaments.

“The International Symposium for the Future Cities” was held in cooperation with International City Leaders, a United Nation’s partner, focusing on cities as the focal points for sustainable development and attended by Ambassadors and diplomats of the ECO Member States. Aiming to expand research and academic cooperation in area of culture, separate Memorandums of Understanding have been signed with the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (Jahad Daneshgahi), University of Tehran as well as Iranology foundation. Also, the conference titled “World Heritage of Shahrood, Bastam, Kharqan” was held in collaboration with ECI at Shahrood University of Technology.

For promotion of tourism in the ECO region, ECI has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kish Free Trade Zone Organization. Also, the fourth tourism conference of Qom, Central and Isfahan provinces was held in partnership with ECI and the organization announced its readiness to expand Islamic tourism in the ECO region.

Considering literature, ECI has organized 8 lecture series on prominent literary figures of ECO region on the themes of: Rumi and his works, semantics on the basis of literary teachings, poetry on Ashura in ECO region and Sama (Sufi whirling) with the Sun. The events are continued and presented by the renowned scholars of the region.

The first of Iran - China music night, titled “Millennium Echoes” was held, a joint performance by Chinese and Iranian artists. Also, the ECO music night titled “Eastern Melodies” was organized and musicians from Iran and Afghanistan staged a joint performance.

Furthermore, International Course of Iranian-Islamic Geometrical Patterns was held in cooperation with the Islamic School of Art.

The other organized events include: “Tehran Artistic Event”, the first press conference held on the occasion of Journalist Day, participated by 38 members of the media, exhibition of calligraphy by Mr. Afjehee was organized and two theater performances were held at ECI auditorium.

Also, negotiation has been made with Iranian National Olympic Committee and FIFA to organize Futsal, polo and horseback riding competitions in Kish Free Trade Zone which demands cooperation by the esteemed Member States. Further relevant information will be circulated to the Member States in due course. The said activities will be organized to fulfill promotion of sports in the ECO region as a key element in cultural diplomacy.

In conclusion, based on the MoU with Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of I.R. Iran, ECI’s magazines including ECO Times and ECO Heritage (print), ECO Norouz in Persian, ECO Urdu and ECO Dergi (electronic) will be published despite the existing financial difficulties. Regarding content of the aforesaid journals, ECI has requested for contribution of Embassies of Pakistan and Turkey in Tehran. This was a summary of recent activities of ECI, further details are available at ECI’s website.

Thank you

Chairman expressed gratitude to ECI and its President for the very comprehensive range of activities which have been organized in spite of ECI's dire straits.

Agenda item 4

Approval of ECI Budget for the year 2019

Chairman noted that ECI's proposed budget for the year 2019 had been circulated among the Member States on 31 August 2018.

Accounts Officer of ECI: informed that no observations regarding ECI's proposed budget for the year 2019 has been received from the Member States since it was circulated. He requested all the Member States to convey in writing their relevant comments to be responded by the Institute.

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan: informed that the proposed budget has been forwarded to the Tajik concerned authorities for consideration and approval and ECI will be officially informed of the outcome accordingly.

Accounts Officer of ECI: explained that the ECI's proposed budget has always been higher than the annual contributions of the Member States. As clearly mentioned in the ECI's proposed budget for the year 2019, the budget deficit would be procured from extra budgetary contributions of the host country.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: informed that the ECI's budget proposal has been conveyed to the relevant authorities in the capital of the country and the Institute will be informed upon the receipt of the awaited response.

She elaborated that while all the ECI Member States are experiencing economic difficulties, savings and reduction in expenses should be made as much as possible.

Although it is considered natural if a budget is increased due to higher costs from year to year but the review of the proposed budget indicates that there could be savings at some heads in the budget.

The Ambassador also requested the Institute to share the detailed list of ECI Staff Strength with the Member States, as deliberated upon in the past working group meetings, including all staff members whether paid in dollar or Rial. She noted that the post of Executive Director has been vacant for a while and the salary and emoluments for the post could be reflected in the savings made by the Institute. The other instance is Purchase of Newspapers; while today all media are digitalized, a substantive increase in the cost has been proposed by the Institute, from 6500 to 63500 USD.

She further added that if the Institute adopts the abovementioned recommendations, the Member States would be in a better position to advise their governments of the savings made by the Institute and convince the authorities to sanction the proposed budget.

Regarding the cost for Purchase of Newspapers, Accounts Officer of ECI clarified that the amount is actually related to the cost for publishing ECI's magazines. It includes both purchase of

newspapers and publications. Referring to page 8 of the proposed budget 2019, he emphasized that only 500 USD is paid for purchase of newspapers and the remaining amount is related to publication of ECI's magazine and books.

President of ECI: elaborated that it's merely a lexical error that needs to be amended. Through the coordination between ECI and the newspapers, made by ECI President, the Institute is not paying any subscription. The cost is pertinent to publication of ECI's magazines and on the base of thrift, only two out of five ECI journals would be printed and the rest are going to be published electronically. The cost for ECI's magazines are funded through the agreement between ECI and Iranian Ministry of Culture.

Another issue to raise is publishing books which is a key mandate of the Institute as per its Charter. Although publication of books by ECI leaves a lot to be desired which caused by financial constraints, a number of volumes have been published, including books launched on the sidelines of the 4th meeting of Heads of National Libraries of the ECO Member States held in 2017 in Tajikistan. To save on the writers charge, we are using dissertations by university students at modest rates. The rest of publishing costs are financed through our partnership with the Ministry of Culture.

ECI President added that savings are also being made in utilities and fuel charges. ECI used to own only 20% of the area of its premises while it currently owns the whole premises, which incurs a major increase in utilities fees but through negotiations with the concerned authorities of public services, the fees will be considerably decreased from this year onward. Also efforts are being made for tax exemption on utilities bills. However, the bureaucratic red tape is a long process.

Regarding transport and traveling expenses, sometimes our staff have to take a taxi to cut fuel consumption. Although ECI President is invited to take part in a great number of events held overseas, he has decreased the number of his trips at the minimum. Even the least number of delegates accompany the President during his trips and most of his traveling expenses are borne by the hos authorities. ECI has adopted thrift in its consumption patterns but it could not adopt the same attitude towards the essence of its function which is its programs and activities. No Member States agrees that ECI activities be reduced.

ECI President pointed out that almost 80 percent of the budget is dedicated to the staff salary and only 20 percent is spent for current expenditures including maintenance of building and equipment.

He stressed that no new member of staff has been recruited during the tenure of the incumbent president. ECI has only hired a number of advisors which are paid at an hourly rate, not from the annual contribution of the Member States but through the extra budgetary contributions and support received by the Institute. Minor changes have been made in the staff strength, account officer was replaced and two staff members retired from the Institute while ECI is unable to afford their end of service emoluments.

He acknowledged that the salary and emoluments for the Executive Director envisaged in the proposed budget could be an instance of potential saving but ECI has always been waiting for him to join the Institute.

A number of ECI staff members receive Rial while it would be better if they are paid in US dollar. It is another instance of saving by the Institute. It would be a valuable gesture if arrangements could be made so that all member of ECI staff be paid in dollar.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: appreciated the efforts made by ECI and regarding the ECI budget for the year 2018, stated that if the source of extra budgetary contributions and where they had been consumed, could be specified, it could help to convince the concerned authorities and expedite approval of the ECI proposed budget for the upcoming year.

The Chairman requested the Member States to accelerate the approval of the ECI proposed budget for the year 2019 by the end of December 2018.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran: proposed that a date before the end of December 2018 would be set as the deadline for submission of the Member states' observations on the ECI proposed budget for the year 2019 otherwise the late/delayed approval of the budget may hamper the smooth functioning of the Institute. ECI has prepared and circulated the proposed budget within the span of time stipulated in its Charter, so the Member States may expedite the approval process to avoid financial problems already encountered by ECI in 2018.

The forum recommended that ECI requests all the Member States vide a circular Note Verbale to convey their observations regarding the proposed budget for the year 2019 by November 2018.

President of ECI: informed that the proposed budget 2019 has been timely prepared and circulated among the Member States more than one month before the current meeting. Since ECI has included proposals from the Member States in its work program within the proposed budget 2019 and no observations from the Member States have been conveyed to ECI to date, it is proposed that the ECI budget 2019 will be approved at the current meeting.

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan: inquired that why only a number of but not the whole ECI staff members have been indicated in the ECI proposed budget.

Accounts Officer of ECI: explained that the provided table is pertinent to the benefits and emoluments of the staff members who will complete their tenure of service in 2019. She noted that the complete list of ECI staff strength was circulated last year among the ECO Member States.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: referred to the table of Consumable and Temporary Services in the proposed budget 2019 and requested ECI to provide further details on the whole personnel who are paid by the Institute, whether they are hired on a temporary or permanent basis. It would help the Member States to convince their governments to approve the proposed budget.

Accounts Officer of ECI: clarified that if the local staff be paid in dollar as per the amounts specified in ECI's Charter, even the total annual contributions of the Member States could not meet the salary of the staff. At the present time, the annual salary which is paid to the ECI staff member from Afghanistan equals to almost 70 percent of the annual contribution of Afghanistan to ECI's budget.

Concerning the annual contribution for the year 2018, we have convinced the relevant authorities in our capital so that the Embassy in Tehran will pay the contribution on itself within coming weeks.

Agenda item 5

Current Status of Outstanding Arrears of the Member States and Non-Payment of Annual Contribution for the year 2018

Accounts Officer of ECI: briefed the meeting on the Current Status of Outstanding Arrears of the Member States as per relevant document provided to the Member States. The amounts are rounded: Afghanistan: 114,000 USD, Iran: excluding 60,000 USD lent to ECI, the arrears equal to 111,000 USD, Pakistan: 358,000 USD and Tajikistan: 460,000 USD.

The Chairman: also elaborated that the annual contribution of Tajikistan for the year 2018 was remitted thrice but returned. He requested the Member States to seriously follow up expediting the payment of annual contributions to ECI. He emphasized that expansion of cultural relations between the Member States is subject to the availability of budget and ECI will not be able to continue its activities without the required funds.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran: informed that the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad is ready to receive Pakistan's annual contribution to ECI.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Tajikistan: referred to the recommendations of the extraordinary meeting of ECI-CPR, held on 30 May 2018 and stated that although the recommendations have been forwarded to the concerned authorities in Tajikistan, but the payment system of the country works on the non-cash basis.

Agenda item 6

The 7th meeting of the ECI Board of Trustees (BoT)

The Chairman explained that the 6th meeting of the ECI Board of Trustees (BoT) was held in Khujand, Tajikistan in 2015. In compliance with ECI's Charter, the meetings of ECI BoT should be held every two or three year.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan informed that the issue has already been conveyed to the relevant authorities in Pakistan and ECI will be informed of the outcome upon the receipt of response. She explained that due to political situation in Pakistan and undergoing elections, the country has not been in a position to convene the meeting. Now that the new government has been formed, the process for organizing the meeting is being accelerated. Although Pakistan is willing to host the meeting and hopefully the response will be forwarded in the near future, with respect

to expedition of the meeting to avoid any further delay and the economic difficulties encountered by the Member States, it is proposed that the meeting will be held in Tehran at ECI Headquarters. Anyway the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran is following up the issue with the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage of Pakistan.

President of ECI: stated that although ECI welcomes the idea to organize the meeting, but a solution for provision of the required funds should be sought and the Member States should make necessary arrangements for participation of the honorable culture ministers from all the Member States. Regarding venue of the meeting, apart from ECI Headquarters, two venues in Babolsar city, North of Iran and Kish Island, South of Iran have been proposed to ECI.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran: raised the technical issue that the meeting should be held by a Member State and that the host country will hold the chairmanship of ECI-CPR. He further proposed that the mechanism could be as follows: ECI, on the basis of the proposal made by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, will request the host country (Islamic Republic of Iran) to consider the possibility of organizing the 7th meeting of the ECI Board of Trustees and the issue will be proceeded by the relevant authorities in partnership with ECI. He also proposed that ECI- CPR meetings shall be held on a monthly basis.

President of ECI: stated that the proposal of the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran pertinent to arrangement of the 7th meeting of ECI-BoT will be considered.

Upon the proposal made by Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the item "Any Other Business" will be included in the agenda of forthcoming ECI- CPR meetings.

Annex-I

**The 29th Meeting of the
ECI Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR)**

List of Participants

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

- Ahmad Haroon Najmpoor, Minister Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission
- Mr. Shafiq Sharq, Cultural Attaché
- Mr. Seyed Nader Pajohesh, Second Secretary
- Ms. Bodaghi, Staff Member, ECO Affairs Department

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- H.E. Majid Bizmark, Director General of the Multilateral Economic and International Cooperation

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan:

- H.E. Ms. Riffat Masood, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- Mr. Imran Heidar, Deputy Head of Mission
- Mr. Mian Azmat Farooq, First Secretary

Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan:

- H.E. Nematullo Emomzoda, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan
- Mr. Mirzosharif Kabirov, Third Secretary

ECO Cultural Institute:

- H.E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri, President
- Ms. Fatemeh Mirbagheri, External Affairs
- Mr. Amin Nazari, Financial Manager
- Mr. Shah Mansur Khojeov, Tajikistan's Desk Officer
- Ms. Masuma Nazari, Afghanistan's Desk Officer
- Ms. Parvin Khalesi, Accounting Officer
- Ms. Firouzkouhi, Cultural Expert
- Mr. Mehdi Omraninejad, Cultural Expert